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1. Into the books

I carefully unwrapped my present from my dad. I spotted the words *Erin Hunter* before ripping the paper off with a jerk.

"Yes!" I hugged the book to my chest. "*Broken Code* number six! Thank you!"

The artwork was amazing, like always. I carefully set my book on the pile of opened presents and got to my knees, about to stand up and put my gifts away, before my mom put her hand out to stop me.

"Al," she said. "This was your uncle's. Take good care of it."

Uncle Jay. The man who had introduced me into the amazing world of Warrior cats when I was eight. My father's only brother.

Uncle Jay was my favorite uncle. We shared a Firestar-Cloudtail relationship.

Uncle Jay and I had spent long hours over the summer at his farmhouse in Texas pretending we're Clan cats. We got my younger siblings Scott, Jake, and Megan into warrior cats as well, and they loved it as much as I did.

We would have long adventures protecting FarmClan from 'intruders' and 'invasions'. We would gather supplies for our 'dens', which in reality, was just doing chores. But Uncle Jay made it fun.

But then Uncle Jay got sick. The doctors figured out he had hidden his HIV status and had developed AIDS. Flu claimed him in under a week.

The animals were sold off and we sold our beloved farm. I took to emerging myself into the world of Warriors. I even created a character in his honor, Jayheart.

"Alex," I looked up at my mother. "Yes ma, I'll take very good care

of it. I promise." She handed the small package to me. I delicately opened it.

Inside was a silver chain with six stained glass pieces resembling the six Clans. StarClan and SkyClan were side by side in the middle. ThunderClan and WindClan were to the right on the wearer's side and RiverClan and ShadowClan were to the left on the wearer's side.

My mom took it and clasped it around my neck. Energy surged through the necklace, just enough for me to notice.

I hugged my parents and took my stuff back to my room. I placed my new books on the bookshelf and sat down on my spiny chair. I took a deep breath.

I glanced at the clock. 10:07 PM. Luckily, it was the Friday before Spring Break. So I had a whole week and extra weekend to read my new books.

I jumped onto my bed, picking up the book that had fallen to the ground. It was well-loved, due to my reading habits of rereading my favorite books. I glanced again at the clock and sighed, putting the book on my nightstand.

I got comfortable, hugged my stuffed Jayfeather to my chest, and closed my eyes.

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I could sense I wasn't alone. My eyes snapped open and I took in my surroundings.

I was in a misty forest. The mist swirled around my feet. I couldn't see the sky through the trees that seemed to go up forever.

"Alex." I spun around. I knew that voice.

"Uncle Jay?" I asked. He nodded and opened his arms. He looked young, pre-sickness. He looked like the way he did when he taught me about the Warrior code, about fighting. About the warriors world.

I ran to him and hugged him. He smelled like forest and rainwater. "Uncle Jay..."

He pulled away, gripping my shoulder. "Alexander, you need to listen to me. *Four generations you will go,*
Through so fast as melting snow
Seven traits that you must learn
For your reality to return."

"What?" But Uncle Jay was fading. "Make me proud. We will be in touch." He smiled at me. A gust of wind blew me back. "No!" I screamed, trying to reach him. "Uncle Jay! Come back!" My eyes slipped shut.

2. Entering ThunderClan

[image]

I opened my eyes and parted my jaw in a huge yawn. My ears swiveled back and forth. Something was scrabbling over wood. Mouse?

I heard screeching to my left. I ran towards the sounds, climbing up a tree and perching on a high branch. My tail helped me keep my balance, thankfully.

The scent of blood hit my nose and I recoiled. I peered through the leaves and saw red dotting the ground.

"ThunderClan, attack!" Yowled a tortoiseshell cat with a ginger tail.

Wait. ThunderClan? Tortoiseshell cat with a ginger tail? Large rocks?

Oh *no*. I was in the fucking Warrior books! And not just any, but Into The Wild!

"Wingpaw! Come on!" A black tom nudged me forward. I looked at him and we both broke off into sprints. I leaped on a stone, watching ThunderClan fighting RiverClan over the rocks.

Memories suddenly flooded through my head. My mother leaving me in a strange territory. Runningwind and Redtail finding me, taking me into the Clan. My apprentice ceremony, a moon before Dustpaw and Sandpaw. Two moons before Ravenpaw and Graypaw.

Ravenpaw! My human side screamed. Ravenpaw was in trouble! I leaped over a silver RiverClan she-cat.

"ThunderClan! Retreat!" Redtail yowled. *No!* I urged my tiny body to run faster. "Ravenpaw, run!" I yowled.

I saw a flash of black and white run. "Don't stop!" I added.

I dodged a swipe from Oakheart. The ThunderClan cats were retreating, pulling back into the forest.

I spotted Tigerclaw following Redtail. A scene flashed before my eyes. I narrowed them and jumped in front of Tigerclaw. "Leave my father alone!" I hissed, arching my back.

Tigerclaw snarled, amber eyes flashing with fury. I had just saved Redtail's and Ravenpaw's life. I lifted my chin.

A screech. Oakheart slipped off the rock, stones falling after him and burying him. His own makeshift grave. I shuddered.

Tigerclaw growled softly. "You *stupid* apprentice." He ran off after the ThunderClan patrol. I looked back at the RiverClan cats trying to dig Oakheart out. I turned and ran after Tigerclaw and the other ThunderClan cats.

I wove my way back to ThunderClan camp. There I saw orange fur next to Whitestorm.

"Wingpaw! Come meet Firepaw," A gray tom called over to me excitedly. "He beat Longtail in a fight!" I made my way over to them, glancing at Longtail. His ear was shredded as he made his way over to the medicine cat den.

"Firepaw, this is Wingpaw. He is Runningwind's apprentice. Wingpaw, this is Firepaw. He's a-" I cut Graypaw off. "A kittypet." Graypaw nodded, suddenly looking nervous. Ravenpaw bounded up to us, eyes shining.

"Wingpaw! What happened when I left the battle?" He asked. I opened my mouth but Sandpaw and Dustpaw walked up to us.

"Well, looks like the orphan and the kittypet are together." Dustpaw snarked. Graypaw growled. "Leave them alone!" Ravenpaw hissed.

"Anyway, Wingpaw. Tonight, meet us in the training hollow. We want to show some moves to you." Sandpaw purred, her whole demeanor suddenly becoming nice and docile.

"Fine. But leave these three out of anything you're planning." I

snapped. Sandpaw and Dustpaw nodded, then slunk away.

With a huff, Graypaw nosed my flank. "Well, we should get Firepaw a nest." He said. "Go ahead, Graypaw. I need to talk to Bluestar." I said, walking towards where the warriors were crowding her.

"Wingpaw! Go get your wounds checked." Redtail hurried towards me. I was puzzled. "But I don't have-" he laid his tail on my mouth, silencing me. "Wingpaw, do it now. As your deputy and your father, I am not asking you."

I dipped my head. "Yes, Father." I murmured, turning and walking towards the medicine cat den. I spotted Tigerclaw glaring at me from the tree stump next to the apprentice's den. I lifted my chin then walked slower, meeting the large warrior's gaze as I passed.

Spottedleaf looked up as I entered. "Tigerclaw, for the la- oh. Hello, Wingpaw." I dipped my head. "Spottedleaf. My father sent me for wound check." She started pulling out herbs before looking me over.

"So, have you seen the new apprentice Bluestar brought in?" Spottedleaf purred. I nodded. "He's kinda cute, isn't he?" She nudged my shoulder. I rolled my eyes. "Whatever, Spottedleaf." But I couldn't keep from smiling.

"I knew it! You should show him the Owl Tree. That always gets the toms." Spottedleaf nudged me again. "That's how I got you." I rolled my eyes again. "You saved me from an owl. When I was three moons old." I retaliated, swiping at her. "Besides, I don't know if he's into toms or she-cats. I mean, cats keep falling over *you* all the time."

"And falling on me." She joked. I shook my head, smiling. "One time, Spottedleaf. One time!" I sighed. I touched my nose to her shoulder. "I'll talk to Runningwind and see if we can join whenever Firepaw learns the territory."

"My brave flying cat." Spottedleaf nosed my shoulder. "Be careful, Wingpaw. This is the dawn of change for the Clans."

I nodded. "I know. Can I go?" I asked, watching her for a moment. Spottedleaf nodded, giving me a quick lick on the head. I stepped out of the medicine cat den, making a beeline for the apprentice den. Maybe I could get some rest before meeting Dustpaw and Sandpaw tonight.

No such luck, it seemed. Runningwind and Redtail were sitting next to the den. I sighed as they stood up and walked over to me.

"Son, we need to talk." Redtail began. "Is this about Sunningrocks?" I asked. Runningwind nodded. "We need a better place to talk. Owl Tree, now."

Redtail walked over to Whitestorm, who nodded and approached us. "I was going to train with Sandpaw while it was still light." He said, walking to the apprentice's den to fetch her. The duo walked towards us, Sandpaw looking irritable.

We headed out of camp, walking briskly to the Owl Tree. I sat down, Runningwind and Redtail sitting down across from me.

"Wingpaw, you need to be careful. Very careful." Redtail lowered his voice. He looked shaken, eyes darting around for any unseen threat. *He's looking for Tigerclaw.* I realized with a jolt of fear.

"We won't be around forever, son. But stay safe. As your mentor I'll be able to go with you on patrols and Redtail can assign patrols with no Tigerclaw, but you'll be a warrior soon enough. Continue to stick with Graypaw, Ravenpaw and Spottedleaf. And that new cat, Firepaw." Runningwind took over. "Never go out without me, Spottedleaf, your father, Whitestorm or Lionheart knowing where you are. And always take someone with you. Even if it's to make dirt." Runningwind added, looking at me with warm eyes. "Understand?"

I nodded, pressing against both my fathers. A memory surfaced. I had come to this tree to come out. My fathers pressing against me after telling me they loved me no matter what. Even if I joined ShadowClan, they would always love me.

Now we were in trouble. And we haven't even reached leaf-fall yet.